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THE SANDMAN™

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS
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the DOLL'S HOUSE part 5

GAIMAN • DRINGENBERG • JONES

IT SEEMED LIKE THE LATE AUTUMN WIND BLEW THEM IN THAT NIGHT, SPINNING AND DIZZYING FROM THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD.

WELCOME CEREAL CONVENTION

HUMAN ARM FOUND IN DITCH

IT WAS A BITCH WIND, KNIFE-SHARP AND CUTTING, AND IT BLEW BAD AND COLD.

AND THEY CAME WITH IT, SCURRYING AND SKITTERING, LIKE YELLOW LEAVES AND OLD NEWSPAPERS, FROM A THOUSAND PLACES AND FROM NOWHERE AT ALL.

...SHE HAS EYES THAT MEN ADORE SO, AND A TORSO EVEN MORE SO...

THEY CAME IN THEIR SUITS AND THEIR TEE SHIRTS, CARRYING RUCKSACKS AND BRIEFCASES AND SUITCASES AND PLASTIC BAGS, MUTTERING AND HUMMING AND SILENT AS THE NIGHT.

WELCOME

IT SEEMED LIKE THE BITTER FALL WIND BROUGHT THEM THERE.

PERHAPS IT DID.

CONVERSION BY WILDSTORM

ON ARRIVAL THEY EYE EACH OTHER WARILY, STRIKE UP CAUTIOUS CONVERSATIONS.

SOME ARE ALREADY ACQUAINTED, AND THEY FORM INSTANT KNOTS AND WHORLS IN THE BAR AND THE LOBBY, WAITING TO CHECK IN, OR FOR THE RESTAURANT TO OPEN.

MAN, I BEEN TRAVELLING FOR FIVE DAYS NOW. THE JOURNEY WAS A REAL KILLER. BELIEVE ME.

HATE THESE LITTLE HICK TOWNS. WOULDN'T BE SEEN DEAD HERE, IF IT WASN'T FOR THE CONVENTION.

...THAT'S JUST WHAT♪ THEY'LL DO. ONE OF THESE DAYS THESE BOOTS ARE GONNA WALK ALL OVER ♪♪ YOU. ♫♪

TELL YOU, I COULD MURDER A STEAK. A GOOD, BLOODY STEAK.

SO THAT WAS WHEN HARRY KILLED THE LIGHTS. I COULD'A DIED.

THEY DO THIS CHOCOLATE FUDGE WHIP THAT IS JUST TO DIE FOR.

HAS ANYONE SEEN THE FAMILY MAN?

TEX

WESTERN RE-CON II

REGISTER HERE!

THE DEVIL? UH, WOULD THAT BE THE KENTUCKY DEVIL, OR THE OREGON DEVIL? I GOT BOTH HERE.

YEAH. HE SLAYS ME. YOU HEARD HIM DO THE "I AM JOHN'S COATHANGER" ROUTINE?

EXCUSE ME? CAN YOU ALL GET YOUR BADGES AND REGISTRATION PACKS FROM THE REGISTRATION TABLE IN THE SCARLETT O'HARA ROOM?

HELL, I THOUGHT THE WHOLE ISSUE WAS DEAD AND BURIED IN THE SIXTIES.

KNOTS BECOME GROUPS AND CLUSTERS, ATTRACTING NEW MEMBERS.

THE TV VERSION? THE TV VERSION BUTCHERED IT! BUT I HEAR YOU CAN GET IT UNCUT ON VIDEO IN CANADA.

HI! I'M CHRIS

DON'T FORGET TO CHECK IN, ONCE YOU'VE REGISTERED.

AND, UM, HAS ANYONE SEEN THE FAMILY MAN?

I NEED TO SPEAK TO THE MANAGER.

MANAGER

THAT'S ME, BUB.

WE'VE TALKED ON THE PHONE. I AM MR. NIMROD, THE CONVENTION ORGANIZER. I JUST WANTED TO CHECK THAT EVERYTHING WAS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN.

BONDAGE TIME

ONE PROBLEM.

WE AGREED THAT YOU WOULD HAVE THE ENTIRE HOTEL FOR YOUR CONVENTION.

OKAY, WELL. THE CONVENTION HALL IS SET UP. I'LL NEED TO CHECK WITH YOU ABOUT THE BANQUET, THE KITCHEN WILL NEED EXACT NUMBERS.

"WAALL, I'M AFRAID WE STILL HAVE TWO GUESTS HERE.

"THEY WERE MEANT TO LEAVE THIS MORNING. SHE WAS ON HER WAY TO VISIT HER BROTHER. TELEPHONED AHEAD THIS MORNING, AND THE POLICE ANSWERED. THE PO-LICE."

SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED TO HER PEOPLE, AND THE POLICE REQUESTED THAT SHE STAYED WHERE SHE WAS, IN CASE THEY NEED HER.

THE SHERIFF SPOKE TO ME, AND I EXPLAINED ABOUT THE CONVENTION, BUT HE SAID THEY STAY ON HERE. I DON'T WANT TROUBLE WITH THE LAW, BUB.

I SEE. HMM. PLEASE ENSURE THAT THEY STAY OUT OF CONVENTION AREAS, THEN.

I DID ALREADY. THEY'VE SAID THEY'LL KEEP THEMSELVES TO THEIR ROOMS.

IN A PERFECT WORLD, ROSE WALKER WOULD BE SITTING IN THE CAR WITH HER BROTHER, JED, NEXT TO HER. GILBERT WOULD BE IN THE BACK.

PERFECT WORLD.

THEY'D BE DRIVING BACK TO THE ROOMS ROSE RENTED, THEN SHE AND JED WOULD FLY BACK TO BOSTON.

JED. ROSE. MOM. TOGETHER...

SHE HASN'T SEEN JED FOR SEVEN YEARS. SHE WAS FOURTEEN. HE WAS FIVE.

PERFECT.

SHE HAD WONDERED IF THEY'D RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER. SHE WAS SO PROUD OF HERSELF FOR TRACKING HIM DOWN.

ONE PHONE CALL. THAT'S ALL IT TOOK AND IT ALL CAME TUMBLING DOWN.

SHE PHONED AHEAD. LET THEM KNOW SHE WAS COMING.

THE POLICE ANSWERED.

PERFECT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN PERFECT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN--

PERFECT.

KNOCK KNOCK

GILBERT.

HOOM?

THIS IS GOING TO DRIVE ME NUTS. YOU KNOW THAT?

WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO TELL YOU A STORY?

I DOUBT HE FEELS LIKEWISE, MISS WALKER.

NO. IF I HEAR ANOTHER OF YOUR THEOLOGICAL PARADOXES, I'LL SCREAM. FRANKLY, TODAY I DON'T CARE IF GOD EXISTS OR NOT.

GILBERT, I'M NOT INTERESTED. I JUST KEEP THINKING ABOUT JED. AND ABOUT UNCLE BARNABY AND AUNT CLARISSA BEING KILLED...

IF YOU WANT TO TELL ME A STORY, TELL ME AN OLD ONE. A FAIRY STORY.

HOOM. DO YOU KNOW THE STORY OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD?

SURE.

THE MAN SAID, HE SAID, THE SHERIFF SAID, THAT THEY'D BEEN KEEPING JED IN THE BASEMENT. LIKE A... LIKE AN ANIMAL.

HOW CAN PEOPLE DO THAT TO PEOPLE?

HOW CAN PEOPLE TREAT OTHER PEOPLE LIKE THAT?

THE RED HOOD WAS AN INVENTION OF CHARLES PERRAULT, WHO TIDIED UP THE FOLK TALES OF FRANCE FOR POPULAR CONSUMPTION IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. OTHER CHANGES -- SUCH AS THE HAPPY ENDING, ARE LATER ADDITIONS.

I WILL TELL YOU AN ORIGINAL VERSION.

A LITTLE GIRL WAS TOLD TO BRING BREAD AND MILK TO HER GRANDMOTHER. AS SHE WAS WALKING THROUGH THE WOOD, A WOLF CAME UP TO HER AND ASKED HER WHERE SHE WAS GOING. "TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE."

THE WOLF RAN OFF AND ARRIVED FIRST AT THE HOUSE. HE KILLED THE GRANDMOTHER, POURED HER BLOOD INTO A BOTTLE AND SLICED HER FLESH ONTO A PLATE. THEN HE GOT INTO HER NIGHTCLOTHES AND WAITED IN THE BED.

KNOCK KNOCK.

"COME IN, MY DEAR."

"I'VE BROUGHT YOU SOME BREAD AND MILK, GRANDMOTHER."

"HAVE SOMETHING YOURSELF, MY DARLING. THERE IS MEAT AND WINE IN THE PANTRY."

THE LITTLE GIRL ATE WHAT WAS OFFERED.

AND AS SHE DID, A LITTLE CAT SAID, "SLUT! TO EAT THE FLESH AND DRINK THE BLOOD OF YOUR GRANDMOTHER!"

THEN THE WOLF SAID, "UNDRESS, AND GET INTO BED WITH ME."

"WHERE SHALL I PUT MY SKIRT?"

"THROW IT ON THE FIRE; YOU WON'T NEED IT ANY MORE."

FOR EACH GARMENT, PETTICOAT, BODICE, AND STOCKINGS, THE GIRL ASKED THE SAME QUESTION, AND THE WOLF REPLIED, "THROW IT ON THE FIRE; YOU WON'T NEED IT ANY MORE."

WHEN THE GIRL GOT INTO BED SHE SAID, "GRANDMOTHER -- HOW HAIRY YOU ARE."

"IT KEEPS ME WARMER, MY DEAR."

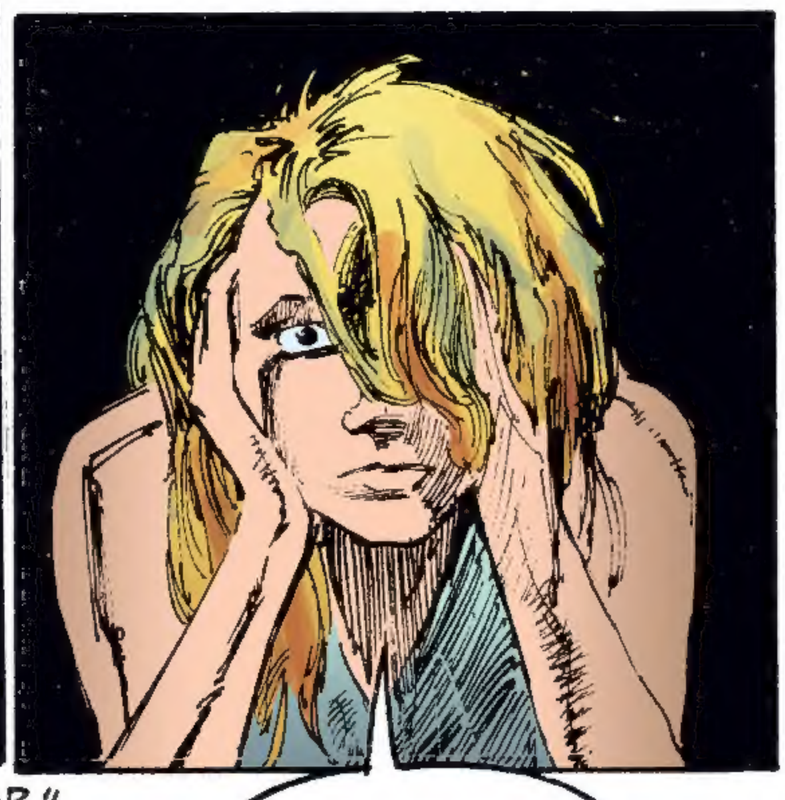
"OH GRANDMOTHER, WHAT LONG NAILS YOU HAVE."

"THEY ARE FOR SCRATCHING MYSELF, MY DEAR."

"OH GRANDMOTHER, WHAT BIG TEETH YOU HAVE."

"THEY ARE FOR EATING YOU, MY DEAR."

AND HE ATE HER.



GILBERT--THAT'S *HORRIBLE.*

"IT BRINGS BAD THINGS, ROSE WALKER. I THINK IT WILL BE BEST IF WE KEEP TO OUR ROOMS."

HOW ARE WE DOING, FUN?

FUN LAND. NOT FUN FUN LAND.

SORRY. FUN LAND, RIGHT.

THAT'S OKAY, MISTER NIMROD. :MUURP:- BEG PARDON.

NIMROD

FAMILY MAN?

EIGHTY PEOPLE HAVE REGISTERED SO FAR. PRETTY GOOD TURNOUT, HUH?

YEAH. NO SIGN OF THE FAMILY MAN?

HASN'T CHECKED IN HERE, YET. MAYBE HE'S NOT COMING.

HE *CAN'T* NOT COME. HE'S OUR GUEST OF HONOR. HE HAS TO COME. I GOT A LETTER FROM OUR BRITISH AGENT SAYING HE'D COME. I EVEN SENT THE AIR TICKETS.

FAMILY MAN?

WELL, HE'S NOT HERE.

HECK. HAVE WE GOT ANY OTHER BIG NAMES SO FAR?

UM. *MOON RIVER*, BUT HE SEEMED KIND OF *SHY*. AND THE *CANDYMAN*, YOU KNOW, THE ONE FROM CONNECTICUT. THE GUY WITH THE *CANDY-CANES* --

--YOU KNOW, THE *LIP COLLECTOR*. HE'S HERE.

WE *HAVE* TO HAVE A GUEST OF HONOR.

EXCUSE ME. IS THIS WHERE I REGISTER?

SURE *IS*, FRIEND.

WHAT NAME WOULD YOU BE LISTED UNDER?

THE CORINTHIAN.

OH. ***WOW***. MISTER NIMROD ***SAID*** YOU'D BE COMING, BUT... WOW. I THOUGHT YOU'D BE ***OLDER***.

HERE'S YOUR STUFF, MISTER CORINTHIAN. UHN, WEAR YOUR BADGE AT ALL TIMES. YOU ***WON'T*** BE PERMITTED INTO THE CONVENTION AREAS ***WITHOUT*** IT. I'M, UH, WE'RE ***ALL*** BIG FANS OF YOURS.

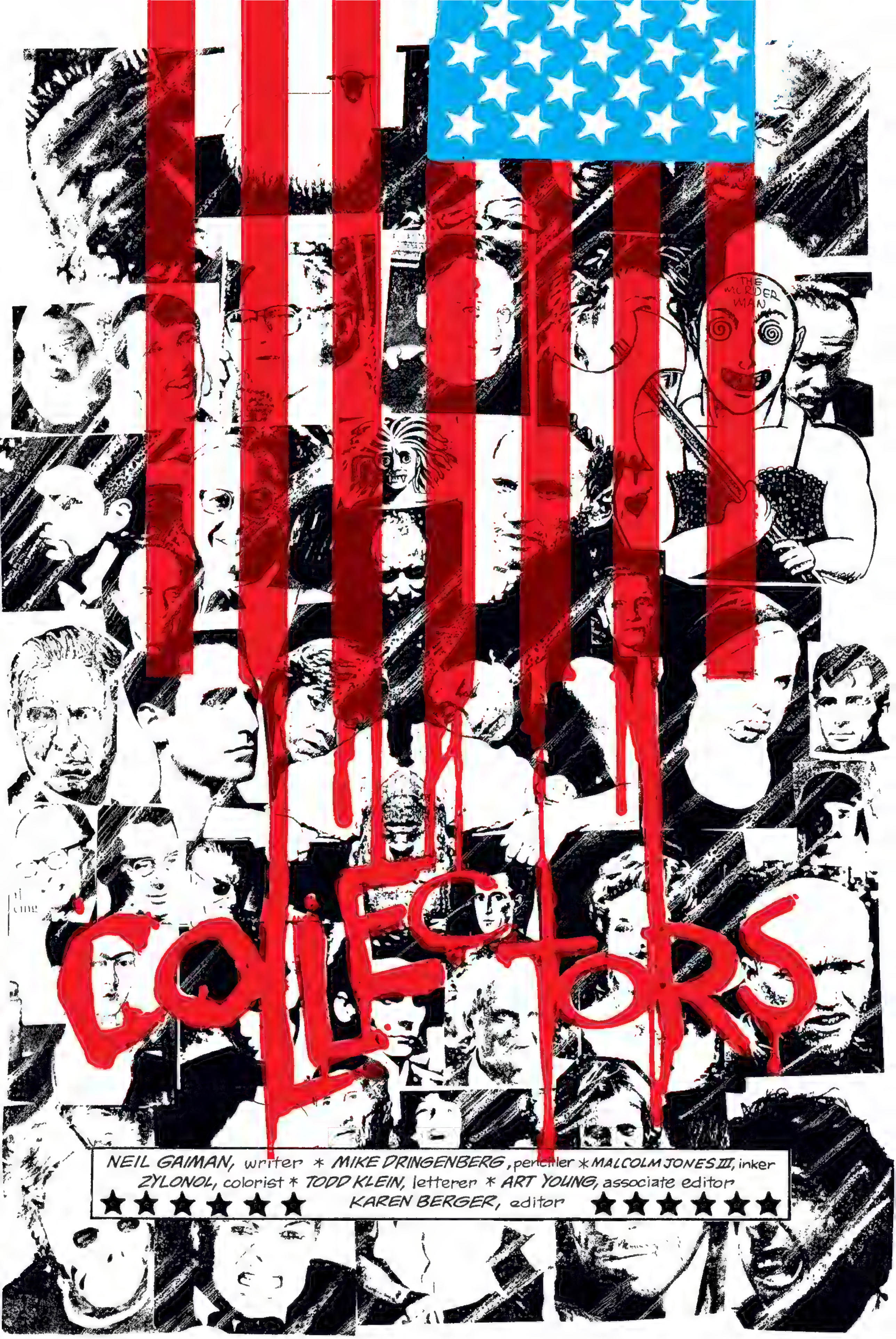
DO YOU THINK I COULD HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH?

EXCUSE ME?

YES?

I'M ***NIMROD***. THE ORGANIZER. WE TALKED ON THE PHONE A FEW DAYS BACK. I HAVE A ***FAVOR*** TO ASK.

YOU SEE, YOU'RE SOMETHING OF A ***LEGEND***. AMONG THE ***COLLECTORS***.



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HE DIDN'T THINK THERE WOULD BE SO *MANY* OF THEM.

NIMROD, A MIGHTY HUNTER BEFORE THE LORD, WHO HAS CERTAINLY BY NOW SHOWN EVERYBODY THAT HE'S NOT AFRAID OF ANYTHING, CERTAINLY NOT BLOOD, DEFINITELY NOT WOMEN, IS...

HE'S *SCARED.*

STAGE FRIGHT.

PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER, HE TELLS HIMSELF. DON'T GO TO PIECES *NOW.*

YOU'RE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CONVENTION COMMITTEE. YOU'RE A SUCCESSFUL ORTHODONTIST.

YOU HAVE A SHACK OUT IN VERMONT THAT NO ONE KNOWS ABOUT, WITH FOUR FULL CHEST FREEZERS (AND ISN'T IT TIME TO BUY A FIFTH?) AND...

HELLO.

THE JOKE. TELL THEM THE JOKE.

I, UH, HEARD A STORY RECENTLY I THOUGHT MIGHT AMUSE YOU. IT SEEMS THAT THE TELEPHONE RANG IN A POLICE STATION. THE DUTY COP ANSWERS AND A WOMAN'S VOICE SAYS, "*HELP*-- I'VE BEEN *REAPED!*"

HE SAYS, "DON'T YOU MEAN *RAPED?*"

"NO," SHE SAYS.

"HE USED A SCYTHE."

LAUGH YOU BASTARDS LAUGH AT MY JOKE LAUGH OR I'LL ...

HA HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

IT'S *REALLY* GOOD TO SEE SO MANY OF US HERE. SO *MANY.* THIS IS THE FIRST OF THESE CONS, AND IF YOU WANT TO SEE ANOTHER, A FEW RULES WE MUST ADHERE TO.

FIRSTLY, USE YOUR PREFERRED SOBRIQUET. NO CIVILIAN NAMES. *SECONDLY,* WE DON'T SHIT WHERE WE EAT.

YOU *ALL* KNOW THAT, PARTICULARLY *NOW,* AND *HERE,* WHEN SO MANY OF US WOULD BE AT RISK.

NOBODY DOES *ANY* COLLECTING UNTIL THE CONVENTION'S OVER AND YOU'RE AT *LEAST* TWO HUNDRED MILES AWAY.

AW...

THIRDLY, ON A MORE UNFORTUNATE NOTE, THE FAMILY MAN HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO MAKE IT. HE'S AN OLD MAN...

BUT EVERY *CLOUD* HAS A SILVER LINING.

I'D LIKE TO PRESENT OUR *NEW* GUEST OF HONOR -- A LEGEND IN HIS OWN LIFETIME, AN INSPIRATION TO US ALL, I KNOW TO ME PERSONALLY...

ONE OF THE *FIRST,* AND ONE OF THE *BEST.*

THEY'VE CALLED HIM *THE EYE GUY,* AND THE *DARK ANGEL,* AND *THE SHADES* AND MAYBE A THOUSAND OTHER NAMES...

BUT *WE'VE* ALWAYS KNOWN IT WAS ONE MAN.

GENTLEMEN. LADIES. OUR GUEST OF HONOR.

THE CORINTHIAN.

YOU KNOW WHAT'S SO *GREAT* ABOUT SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

NO.

WE'RE *ALL* SO *DIFFERENT*. UNITED BY OUR COMMON INTERESTS. THAT'S *GREAT*.

FILM PROGRAM

DON'T LOOK NOW 8:30
THE COLLECTOR 10:00
MANHUNTER 11:30
FROM THE LIFE OF THE MARIONETTES 1:00
IN COLD BLOOD 2:30
COMPULSION 4:00
STRAIGHT ON TILL MORNING 5:
RRY ON SCREAMI
NIGHT OF THE H

SATURDAY.

WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING AT?

THE FILM PROGRAM. THEY'RE SHOWING *THE COLLECTOR*. A REMARKABLE NOVEL. WHEN I FIRST READ THAT BOOK, I THOUGHT--

--FOR THE *FIRST* TIME, I AM UNDERSTOOD.

EXCUSE ME, BUT I'VE SEEN *YOU BEFORE*, HAVEN'T I? YOU'RE THAT *DOCTOR*. WOW--TO THINK THAT *YOU'RE* A--THAT YOU'RE A COLLECTOR. *WOW*.

:Khoff:. MM. THANK YOU. *YOU* ARE?

I'M THE *BOGEYMAN*.

I'VE HEARD OF YOU. THE *NEWSPAPERS*, IN THEIR FACILE WAY, HAVE CHRISTENED ME *FLAY-BY-NIGHT*. SEVENTY-NINE.

SORRY?

"GIVE ME A NUMBER." THAT'S YOUR LINE, ISN'T IT? *SEVENTY-NINE*.

OH YEAH, RIGHT. SHE WAS, LIKE, SHE HAD THESE BEAUTIFUL EYES, LIKE PATCHES OF SKY EARLY IN THE MORNING, AND SHE SCREAMED LIKE AN ANGEL.

SAY, YOU EVER READ A MAGAZINE CALLED *CHASTE*? IT'S REALLY TERRIFIC.

I'VE HEARD OF IT.

THE DOCTOR HAS TREATED PRESIDENTS. HE'S PIONEERED RADICAL NEW OPERATIONS-- SOME WITH STARTLING SUCCESS. HE'S SAVED MANY LIVES.

HE HAS OVER A HUNDRED.

HE MAKES THEM HIMSELF.

HE COLLECTS LEATHER NECKTIES. THEY WROTE ABOUT IT IN THE NEW YORK TIMES.

HE WEARS A NEW ONE AT EVERY MEDIA EVENT HE ATTENDS.

CAN I HAVE YOUR AUTOGRAPH?

NO. OF COURSE NOT. DON'T BE FOOLISH. I THINK I SHALL ATTEND A PANEL DISCUSSION.

THE PANEL'S CALLED *MAKE IT PAY*. LOOKS INTERESTING.

THANK YOU, DOG SOUP.

DOG SOUP IS A WOMAN?

JESUS.

...EVEN 10 G'S PER VICTIM IDENTIFIED ISN'T TOO MUCH TO ASK.

THE THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT THEY'LL *PAY* TO KNOW FOR *CERTAIN*. EVEN IF THE COPS DON'T GO WITH IT, THE *FAMILIES* WILL. LIKE THE DUDE IN CANADA...

SURELY, WHAT THE CHOIRBOY IS DESCRIBING IS A WORST-CASE SCENARIO, ONCE THEY'VE CAUGHT YOU ALIVE--AND *YOU* DON'T GET THE MONEY, REMEMBER THAT.

BUT, CARRION, WE DON'T *DO* IT FOR THE MONEY!

THE CHOIRBOY

HELLO

LITTLE GIRL

CARRION

LOOK, GIL, WHAT IF SOMEONE PHONES WHILE WE'RE OUT? WHAT IF THERE'S *NEWS?*

IF THERE IS NEWS IT WILL WAIT, MISS WALKER. YOU NEED FRESH AIR.

WE BOTH DO. A WALK WILL DO US GOOD.

OF COURSE, I NEVER *MET* THE BOGEYMAN. BUT I'M PERFECTLY CERTAIN THE YOUNG MAN CLAIMING HIS IDENTITY IS NOT HE.

THE BOGEYMAN IS *DEAD*, DOCTOR. HE DROWNED IN LOUISIANA, THREE YEARS AGO.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

FSSSSSH

I KNOW.

WE NEED TO DEAL WITH THIS. *IMMEDIATELY.*

I SUGGEST YOU TALK TO NIMROD ABOUT IT.

HEY. SOME OF THESE CEREAL NUTS ARE KIND OF CUTE.

GILBERT?

ARE YOU OKAY?

FSSSSH

EMPIRE HOTEL

LOOK, *WHY* WON'T YOU TELL ME?

WHAT'S TO BE AFRAID OF?

THINGS. MEMORIES. PEOPLE. DREAMS. I DO NOT KNOW.

OR, AT LEAST, I CANNOT SAY.

FORGIVE ME, MISS WALKER. ONE MOMENT.

I HAVE WRITTEN A NAME ON THIS PAPER, ROSE. READ IT TO YOURSELF. DO *NOT* SAY IT ALOUD.

IF... IF THINGS GET *BAD*, CALL THE NAME, ROSE WALKER.

CALL HIM...

...AND MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON US ALL.

I AM A MERCIFUL GOD AND A JUST GOD. FOR I RELEASE MEN AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM THE SUFFERING AND TORMENT OF THEIR LIVES, AND I GIVE THEM A NEW LIFE IN MY HEAVEN...

AS A BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN I WANT TO DISASSOCIATE MYSELF FROM THIS MADMAN.

I DO THE BIDDING OF THE LORD. I WASH THEIR ROBES AND MAKE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.

WITH MY HAMMER. WITH MY LOVE.

BOGEYMAN, CAN WE *TALK*? IN YOUR HOTEL ROOM?

UHN, WELL, I'M WATCHING THE RELIGION PANEL, MAN. BUT... UH, SURE.

GOD. GOD TELLS ME TO DO IT.

OW!

LISTEN, YOU GUYS -- OH GOD -- LISTEN, WHAT IS THIS? I'M THE BOGEYMAN.

REALLY I AM.

GIVE ME A NUMBER, ANY NUMBER.

CHASTE

CHASTE

YOUR NAME IS PHILIP SITZ. YOU'RE THE EDITOR, WRITER, WHATEVER, OF *CHASTE* MAGAZINE.

YOUR NUMBER'S UP, PHILIP. YOU AREN'T ONE OF US.

NO--NO, I *AM*. I UNDERSTAND IT. FEMALES ARE INSECTS CREATED FOR MALE PLEASURE. *STRENGTH*. *ENERGY*. *LUST*.

THE WILLINGNESS TO SACRIFICE ANOTHER'S *LIFE* FOR ONE'S *OWN* GRATIFICATION...

I UNDERSTAND IT. THAT'S WHY I *HAD* TO GET HERE. TO SEE YOU ALL. TO *LEARN*.

BIG MISTAKE, PHILIP.

BIG MISTAKE.

"WE DON'T SHIT WHERE WE EAT," MR. NIMROD?

EXCEPT WHEN WE HAVE TO, DOCTOR. NEEDS MUST, WHEN THE DEVIL DRIVES.

DO YOU *ALWAYS* DRIVE LIKE THAT?

SURE.

I WAS NERVOUS, WITH HIM ON MY LAP. WE *SHOULD* HAVE PUT HIM IN THE *TRUNK*.

I HAVE *SOMETHING* IN THE TRUNK ALREADY.

YOU CERTAINLY KNOW THIS AREA WELL, CORINTHIAN.

I MADE A PREVIOUS VISIT A DECADE BACK. THERE ARE *SOME* HERE-ABOUTS WHO STILL HAVE *NIGHTMARES* ABOUT IT...

GOOD. YOU'RE AWAKE.

IT WOULD BE BOORISH TO INQUIRE HOW YOU OBTAINED THE LATE BOGEYMAN'S INVITATION TO OUR GATHERING.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE.

YOU SAY YOU CAME TO US TO *LEARN*. VERY WELL. WE'LL *TEACH* YOU. TEACH YOU THAT IT *ISN'T* THE SEX; *ISN'T* THE POWER; *ISN'T* THE CRUELTY.

WE ARE *SOLDIERS* OF *DARKNESS*, PHILIP. GLADIATORS, WARRIORS AND GODS.

AND WE'LL TEACH YOU.

FOR MYSELF, I HAVE A PENCHANT FOR EYES.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT WE'RE GOING TO DO *NOW*, PHILIP?

WE'RE GOING TO TAKE TURNS.

THE GOOD DOCTOR LIKES TO SKIN PEOPLE ALIVE.

NIMROD IS A HUNTER. HE CAN BONE, JOINT AND GUT ANY ANIMAL IN MINUTES.

I, UH, I DON'T REALLY DANCE. Y'KNOW. MY *MOM* DOES BALLROOM DANCING, SINCE SHE RETIRED. SAYS IT GETS HER OUT OF THE HOUSE. NOT *ME*, THOUGH.

I ONLY GO TO DISCOS WHEN I'M HUNTING.

GOSH. I WOULDN'T HUNT IN PLACES LIKE *THAT*.

--AFRAID TO FLY, EVERYONE WANTS TO BE ON A POSTAGE STAMP AND NO ONE WANTS TO DIE--

DISCO

I, UH, HAVE THIS PLACE. =MUURP.= PARDON ME.

I CAN'T TELL ANYONE ELSE WHERE IT IS, BECAUSE, WELL, YOU'D *ALL* WANT TO GO THERE.

'S A GREAT PLACE.

LIKE, *THOUSANDS* OF PEOPLE. AND THERE ARE ALWAYS BEAUTIFUL LITTLE CHILDREN, WANDERING OFF ON THEIR OWN, GETTING LOST. *ALWAYS* SO PLEASED TO SEE SOMEBODY *FRIENDLY*.

AND QUIET PLACES TO TAKE THEM TO, EVEN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CROWDS, WHERE *NO ONE* WILL DISTURB YOU BEFORE YOU'VE FINISHED.

AND WHAT'S *GREAT* IS, THE PEOPLE WHO RUN THE PLACE ALWAYS HUSH IT UP. *THEY* DON'T WANT ANYONE TO KNOW THAT I'M THERE *EITHER*. THEY DON'T WANT PEOPLE TO STOP GOING.

THEY WANT *EVERYBODY* TO BE *HAPPY*. JUST LIKE ME.

IT'S A *WONDERFUL* PLACE, MY *SECRET, SPECIAL* PLACE.

DISCO

AND THE OTHER THING I LOVE, IF YOU *CAN'T* FIND ANY BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN TO *PLAY* WITH, YOU CAN ALWAYS GO ON ONE OF THE *RIDES*.

--SHE'S GOT BOOTS OF SHINY, SHINY LEATHER, SHINY LEATHER IN THE DARK--

I'M SORRY, MA'AM. THIS IS A CONVENTION FUNCTION. YOU CAN'T GO IN.

OH. HECK. I FIGURED THAT SINCE IT WAS ONLY THE DISCO, NOBODY WOULD MIND IF I CAME IN AND DANCED FOR A TIME.

I COULDN'T SLEEP.

--A THOUSAND DREAMS THAT WOULD AWAIT ME, DIFFERENT COLORS MADE OF TEARS--

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. WELL, THANKS ANYWAY.

SEE YOU AROUND.

WA-WELL, I'M SORRY, MISS. SORRY, BUT IT'S ONLY FU-FOR PEOPLE AT THE CONVENTION, MUH-MISS.

I'M RUH-REAL SORRY.

MOON RIVER--HOW OLD WOULD YOU SAY SHE WAS? THAT LITTLE GIRL?

THAT BEAUTIFUL LITTLE GIRL.

I DUNNO. SEVENTEEN, MAYBE. EIGHTEEN?

REALLY? I THINK SHE LOOKS YOUNGER.

MUCH YOUNGER.

YOU CATCH ANY OF THE PANEL DISCUSSIONS?

ONLY THE RELIGION PANEL.

I DON'T *BELIEVE* IN IT.

YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN RELIGION?

I DON'T BELIEVE IN *GOD*, THE *DEVIL* OR *MAN*. I HATE THE *WHOLE* DAMNED HUMAN RACE, INCLUDING *MYSELF*.

WHAT'S YOUR SCORE?

SCORE?

I GOT A HUNDRED AND SEVENTY ONE. *DROWNED* MOST OF THEM.

YOU?

EIGHT.

EIGHT?

THAT'S CHICKEN-SHIT, MAN! *EIGHT?*

EIGHT. AS YOU SAID, YOU'LL TAKE ANYTHING. *ANYONE*. THE WHOLE DAMNED HUMAN RACE. ME? I *SPECIALIZE*.

I'M THE CONNOISSEUR.

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT PREOPERATIVE TRANSSEXUALS THAT MAKES THE CONNOISSEUR UNCOMFORTABLE. SOMETHING BRITTLE AND BRIGHT IN THE BACK OF THEIR EYES.

HE LOVES THEM.

BUT HE ALWAYS FEELS THEY'RE LAUGHING AT HIM.

HE'S ONLY EVER FOUND EIGHT THAT HE'S BEEN ABLE TO TALK TO.

REALLY TALK TO.

...SO WHAT DO YOU TALK TO THEM *ABOUT?*

BUSINESS. THE WEATHER. NOTHING IMPORTANT. JUST THINGS. *STUFF.*

UH... RIGHT.

HEY, GOOD LOOKIN'. COME AND *BOOGIE!* I *LOVE* THIS SONG.

WILD THING! YOU MAKE MY HEART SING! YOU MAKE EVERYTHING *GROOVY...*

IT'LL BE GOOD TO GET BACK. I HAVE TO GET SOME SLEEP BEFORE TOMORROW MORNING.

I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO YOUR GUEST OF HONOR SPEECH, CORINTHIAN.

WHAT HAVE YOU GOT IN THE *TRUNK* THAT'S SO *IMPORTANT,* THEN?

THAT WAS ENJOYABLE. DOING IT TOGETHER LIKE THAT.

PITY IT HAD TO END SO *SOON,* REALLY.

JUST A LITTLE SOMETHING FOR LATER.

DID YOU -- DID YOU JUST SAY THAT I HAVE TO MAKE A *SPEECH?*

HMM.

GILBERT? GOOD MORNING.

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT *YOU*, BUT I COULD *MURDER* A *GRAPEFRUIT*.

C'MON, GILBERT. *FOOD*, GILBERT.

YOU KNOW. *BREAKFAST.*

GILBERT?

10:30 AM. PANEL DISCUSSION. "WE ARE WHAT WE ARE."

THEY SAY THE FUNDAMENTAL ACT OF HUMANITY IS NOT TO KILL.

BULL. THE FUNDAMENTAL ACT OF HUMANITY *IS* TO KILL. *THEY* ARE SHEEP AND CATTLE. BUT *WE* KNOW THE TRUTH. WE'RE *ALIVE.*

12:30 PM. PANEL DISCUSSION. "WOMEN IN SERIAL KILLING."

I TELL YOU, I'M *SICK AND TIRED* OF WOMEN IN OUR LINE BEING *STEREOTYPED* AS BLACK WIDOWS OR KILLER NURSES.

I'M A *SERIAL KILLER*, AND A *WOMAN*, AND I'M PROUD OF IT.

THE GRASS WIDOW

DOG SOUP

DARK ANGEL

3:30 PM. PANEL DISCUSSION. "THERE IS NO SANITY CLAUSE."

UHN, LOOK, AS A PRACTICING PSYCHIATRIST, I, UH, WELL, LOOK, NONE OF YOU, UH, WELL, THERE'S NO MORE EVIDENCE OF MENTAL ABNORMALITY AMONGST US PEOPLE THAN AMONGST, UM, *THEM.*

LESS, MAYBE.

EL DORADO

PSYCHO-KILLER

CANDY MAN

4:30 PM.

FUN LAND, GUEST OF HONOR SPEECH IN TEN MINUTES.

YES, SIR.

SO WHAT WERE YOU SAYING? HOW YOU GOT STARTED?

PUSSIES.

PUSSIES?

WHEN I WAS A KID. CUTTING THEIR HEADS OFF WITH MY POCKET KNIFE.

THEN, WHEN I GOT OLDER, PUSSIES DIDN'T DO IT FOR ME ANY MORE.

"I USED TO GET MYSELF OFF. I'D RESIST THE URGE FOR WEEKS, THEN IT'D GET TOO STRONG FOR ME, AND I'D GO OUT AND BUY A SKIN MAG, IN ANOTHER CITY, WHERE NO ONE KNEW ME.

"I'D TAKE IT INTO A JOHN, LOCK MYSELF IN, AND DO IT TO MYSELF UNTIL I COULDN'T DO IT ANY MORE. THEN I'D HATE MYSELF. I'D RIP UP THE MAGAZINE INTO SHREDS.

"AND THE URGE WOULD GO AWAY FOR A WHILE.

"I COULDN'T GET OVER IT. ALL THESE WOMEN IN THE WORLD... AND UNDER THEIR CLOTHES EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM WAS NAKED, YOU KNOW...

"AND THEN IT GOT MORE VIOLENT. I'D FANTASIZE STUFF... I'D REHEARSE IT, IN MY MIND. EVEN IN REALITY.

"I USED TO FOLLOW WOMEN AROUND, WITH A KNIFE IN MY POCKET, AND A LENGTH OF WIRE, JUST TO SEE HOW IT FELT.

"THEN I DID IT.

"THE REAL THING.

"THE URGE BUILT UP, AND I COULDN'T HANDLE IT ANY OTHER WAY.

"MAN, I *KNOW* IT'S NOT NORMAL FOR A MAN TO GO OUT AND DISMEMBER A WOMAN JUST BECAUSE HE WANTS TO HAVE SEX WITH HER.

"EMOTIONALLY, I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH LONGER I CAN HANDLE IT.

"BUT THE URGE BUILDS UP IN ME, AND I DO IT TO THEM. AND WHEN I'M FINISHED, AND THE URGE IS SATISFIED, I RIP THEM TO SHREDS.

"LIKE I DID WITH THE SKIN MAGAZINES.

"LIKE I DID WITH THE PUSSIES."

I DUNNO. I THOUGHT MAYBE IF I CAME HERE, I'D MEET OTHER PEOPLE WITH THE SAME PROBLEM. PEOPLE I COULD *TALK* TO, WHO'D UNDERSTAND.

WHO'D *HELP* ME.

BUT NO ONE ELSE HAS REALLY BEEN *INTERESTED.*

I, UH, SOMETHING'S COME UP. SOMETHING I HAVE TO DO. I, UH, I, UH, I'LL SEE Y'AROUND THEN, UH...

YEAH. FINE.

NO PROBLEM.

BOY, ROSIE, YOU'RE A REAL SCREAMING *SUCCESS* ON *THIS* ONE. NOT ONLY DID YOU *NOT* FIND JED, BUT YOU LOST GILBERT *EN ROUTE.*

PAT YOURSELF ON THE BACK.

THREE CHEERS FOR ROSE.

AND WHAT ON *EARTH* WAS *THIS* ABOUT? "IF THINGS GET BAD, CALL THE NAME..."

GILBERT, WHAT *IS* THIS? WHERE *ARE* YOU?

KNOCK KNOCK

HELLO?

ROOM SERVICE. GOT A MESSAGE FOR YOU, MA'AM. FROM YOUR GRANDMOTHER.

FROM UNITY?

IT'S NOT *REALLY* ROOM SERVICE. IT'S *ME*.

WE'RE GOING TO *PLAY*, LITTLE GIRL. WE CAN MAKE BELIEVE IT'S MY *SPECIAL* PLACE.

IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL...

I LOVE THAT SONG. IT'S *SO* TRUE. *SO TRUE*.

NOW, WHEN WE'VE *FINISHED* YOU MUSTN'T TELL ANYBODY THAT I PLAYED WITH YOU.

ESPECIALLY NOT MISTER NIMROD.

HE SAID THAT *DIRTY* STUFF AT THE BEGINNING ABOUT *WHAT WE DON'T DO WHERE WE EAT.*

WASH HIS *MOUTH* OUT WITH *SOAP*, MOMMA.

I LOVE YOU, LITTLE GIRL.

MORPHEUS

I *LOVE* YOU TO DEATH.

MORPHEUS

YOU -- YOU CAN TAKE OFF YOUR *DRESS*, YOU KNOW.

YOU WON'T NEED IT ANY MORE.

MORPHEUS

M-MORPHEUS...?

RRIP

I HOPE YOU DIDN'T SAY SOMETHING *DIRTY*.

I DON'T LIKE *DIRTY* LITTLE GIRLS. I CALL THEM LITTLE *SLUTS*.

Let go of her, Nathan Diskin.

Let go of her now.

She isn't yours, Nathan. She belongs to no one, except perhaps to herself.

Now: dream.

YOU CAN'T HAVE HER. *SHE'S MY* FRIEND. WE WERE PLAYING. *SHE'S MINE*.

And as for you, Rose Walker, heal. Heal and breathe.

Then leave this building.

I have other business here, and I would not see you further troubled...

ROSE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING, DOESN'T CARE.

ONE THING PENETRATED. ONE THING SHE KNOWS.

SHE'S GETTING OUT.

Z Z Z Z Z

KKH. HHH. KKH.

And all his little friends come running. *Hello,* they say to the funny giant, *will you be our friend? Will you play with us? We promise never to make fun of you.*

Of course I'll be your friend, he tells them.

I'm sorry, he tells the children. *I'm sorry I hurt you all. Do you forgive me?*

Of course we forgive you, they say. *Now, let us play some more in these gardens, which are paradise.*

It is the most wonderful dream he has ever had.

YOU KNOW, I DON'T USUALLY SPEAK IN PUBLIC. BUT THE OPPORTUNITY OF TALKING TO ALL OF YOU IS JUST TOO GOOD TO PASS UP.

BECAUSE YOU ARE SPECIAL PEOPLE. *VERY* SPECIAL PEOPLE.

WE ARE THE AMERICAN DREAMERS, DRIVING DOWN THE HOLY ROAD TO TRUE KNOWLEDGE THAT'S PAVED WITH BLOOD AND GOLD.

AND ACROSS THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THIS FAIR COUNTRY, WE ARE KILLING PEOPLE.

WE DON'T DO IT TO MAKE A LIVING. WE DON'T DO IT FOR REVENGE.

WE DON'T KILL PEOPLE ANONYMOUSLY--POISONING THEIR ASPIRIN, PUTTING SHARDS OF GLASS IN BABY FOOD.

WE DON'T DRIVE CARS ONTO CROWDED SIDEWALKS.

WE DON'T CARRY GUNS INTO BURGER JOINTS AND BLAST AWAY UNTIL A *SWAT* TEAM SPATTERS OUR BRAINS ALL OVER THE FRENCH FRIES.

WE DO NOT MURDER FOR A PROFIT. WE DO NOT MURDER FOR GOVERNMENTS, OR FOR HIRE.

WE KILL TO KILL.

WE ARE ENTREPRENEURS IN AN EXPANDING FIELD.

UH...

WE ARE GLADIATORS, AND WE ARE SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE, AND WE ARE SWASHBUCKLERS AND HEROES AND KINGS OF THE NIGHT.

WE ARE THE LIVING. AND THAT'S A TRIUMPH. OUR TRIUMPH. AND OUR GLORY.

You dicappoint me, Corinthian.

You, and these humans you inspired and created, disappoint me.

You were my masterpiece, or so I thought.

A nightmare created to be the darkness, and the fear of darkness in every human heart.

A black mirror, made to reflect everything about itself that humanity will not confront.

But look at you.

Forty years walking the earth, honing yourself, infecting others with your joy of death and what have you given them?

What have you wrought, Corinthian?

NOTHING.

Just something else for people to be scared of, that's all.

You've told them that there are bad people out there. And they've known that all along.

SO WHAT NOW? DO YOU EXPECT ME

TO SUBMIT QUIETLY? TO RETURN TO THE DREAMING TO SCAR THEIR SLEEPING MINDS?

NEVER AGAIN TO KNOW THE DELIGHTS OF A SWEET BOY'S EYE AS IT POPS BETWEEN MY TEETH?

IS THAT IT?

No. That's not it.

THEN LET US *FIGHT*, DREAM LORD. PUT ON YOUR HELM.

LET ME SHOW YOU THE ARTS OF *PAIN* AND *WAR* I HAVE *LEARNED* ON THIS EARTH...

No, Corinthian. We shall not fight. And you shall not go back to the Dreaming.

It is my fault, I am afraid. I created you poorly, then.

As I do uncreate you now.

NO...

The next time I make you, you shall not be so flawed and petty, little dream.

And you, you that call yourselves collectors.

Until now, you have all sustained fantasies in which you are the maltreated heroes of your own stories.

Comforting daydreams in which, ultimately, you are shown to be in the right.

No more.

For all of you, the dream is over. I have taken it away.

For this is my judgment on you: that you shall know, at all times, and forever, exactly what you are. And you shall know just how LITTLE that means.

Now LEAVE.

YOU?

COLLECT YOURSELF, MISS WALKER. IT IS ONLY ME...

I *THINK* THIS IS YOUR BROTHER.

I FOUND HIM. HE WAS LOCKED IN THE BOOT OF A CAR. I HEARD HIM SOBBING.

IS HE DEAD?

NO. HE'S UNCONSCIOUS, BUT STILL ALIVE. WE URGENTLY NEED TO GET HIM TO A HOSPITAL.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED HERE TODAY, GILBERT.

I DON'T THINK I *WANT* TO. NOT YET.

YOU *CALLED* HIM, DIDN'T YOU? I SUPPOSE WE WILL *BOTH* HAVE TO FACE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THAT.

IN THE MEANTIME, I THINK WE SHOULD CALL AN AMBULANCE FOR THE BOY, AND THEN MAKE OUR WAY HOME.

GILBERT? GILBERT, I'M SO COLD. AND SO SCARED.

SO COLD...

THE FIRST WIND OF WINTER BLEW FROM THE NORTH, AND IT HAD ICE AND RIME ON ITS BREATH.

IT WAS DIRTY AND SHARP AND IT CUT LIKE A RAZOR, AND IF IT TOUCHED YOU, YOU COULD WASH AND WASH UNTIL YOUR SKIN WAS TATTERED AND BLOODIED, BUT YOU'D NEVER BE CLEAN AGAIN.

WELCOME CEREAL CONVENTION

IT SCATTERED THEM INTO THE NIGHT, THE QUIET ONES WITH DEATH IN THEIR EYES.

BUT THEY LEFT MORE TENTATIVELY THAN THEY HAD COME, AS IF THEY HAD SEEN SOMETHING UNHOLY INSIDE THEMSELVES; SOMETHING THEY WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO FORGET.

AND THEY LEFT, SLOWLY, ONE BY ONE, WITH RELUCTANCE, LEAVING THE SAFETY OF THE LIGHT FOR THE CHILL CERTAINTIES OF THE DARKNESS.

IT SEEMED LIKE THE NIGHT SUCKED THEM UP, TOOK THEM INTO ITS DARK HEART.

IT SEEMED LIKE THE DARKNESS SWALLOWED THEM...

PERHAPS IT DID.

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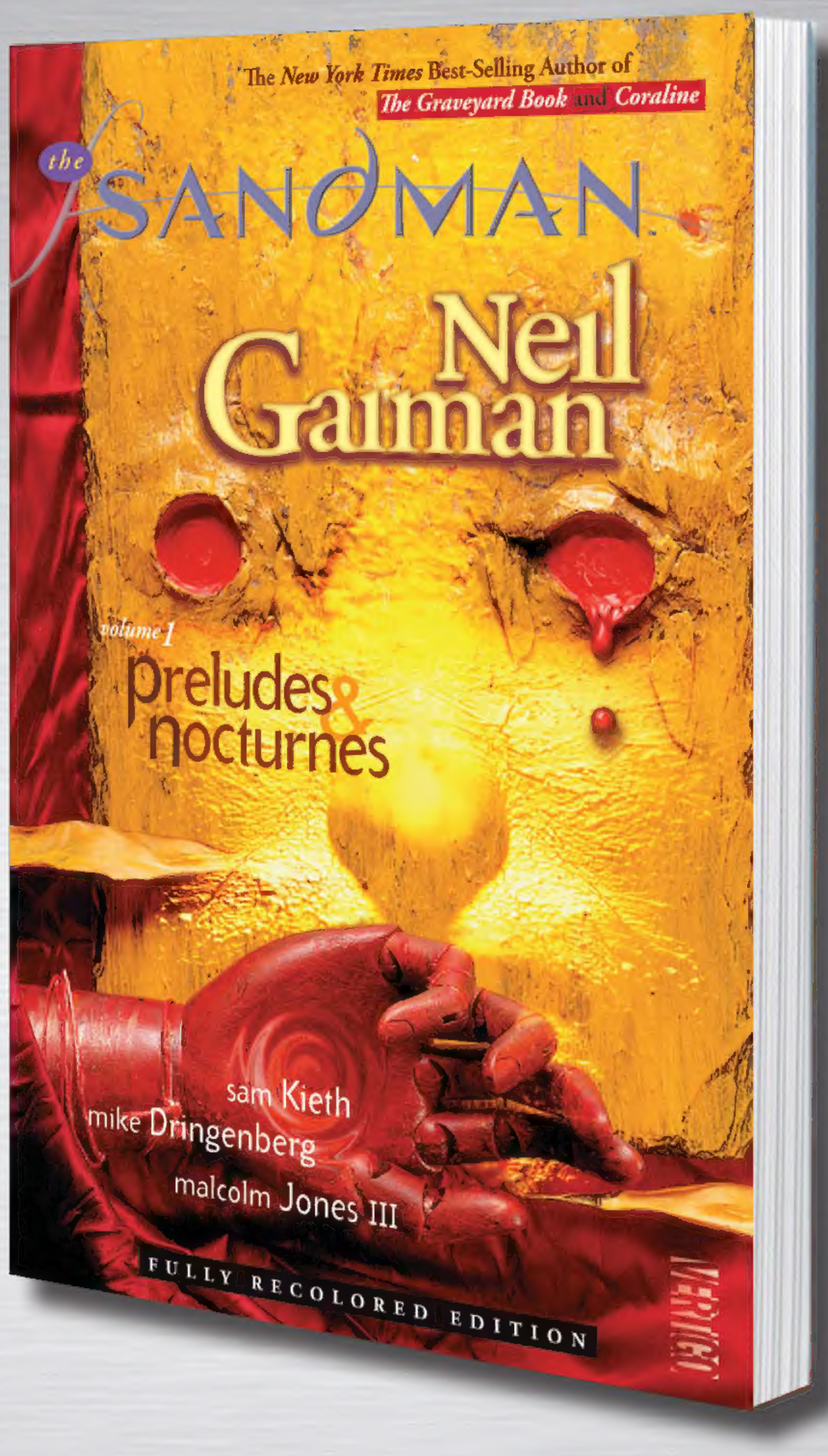

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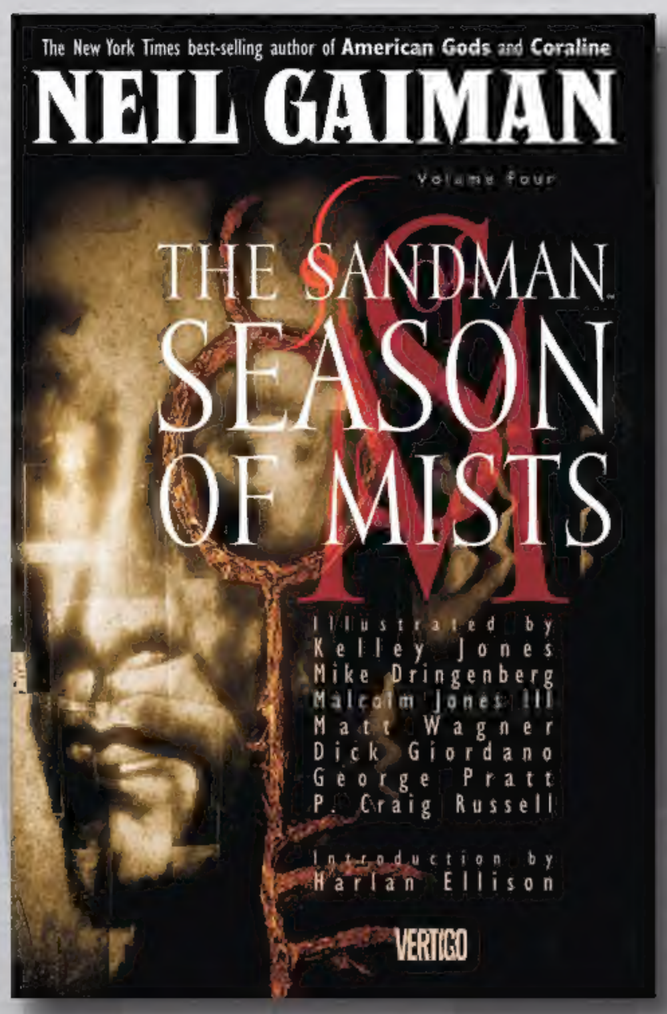

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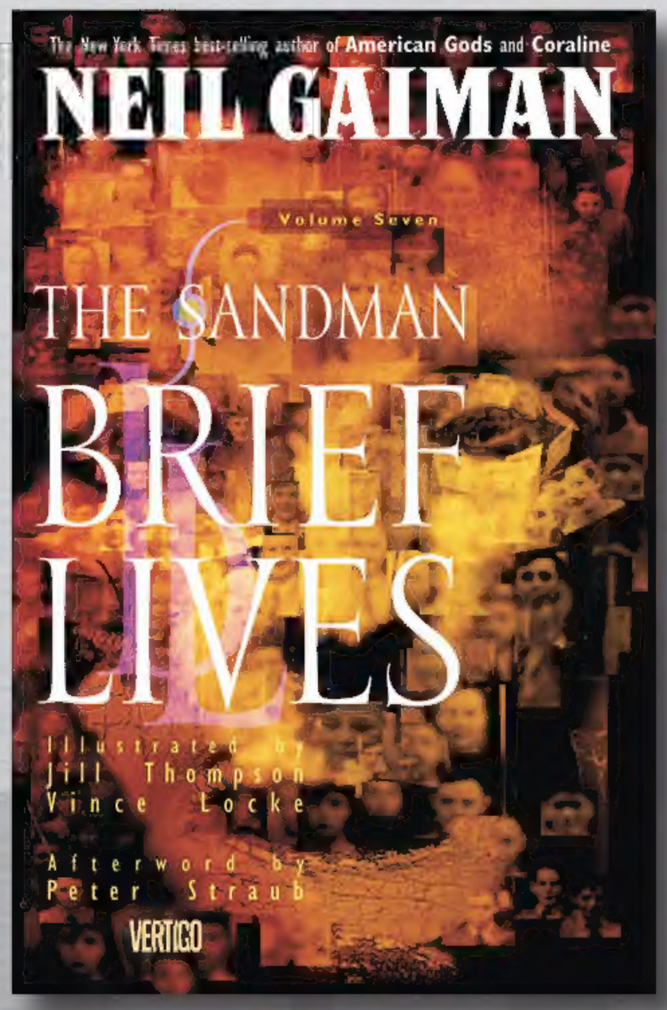

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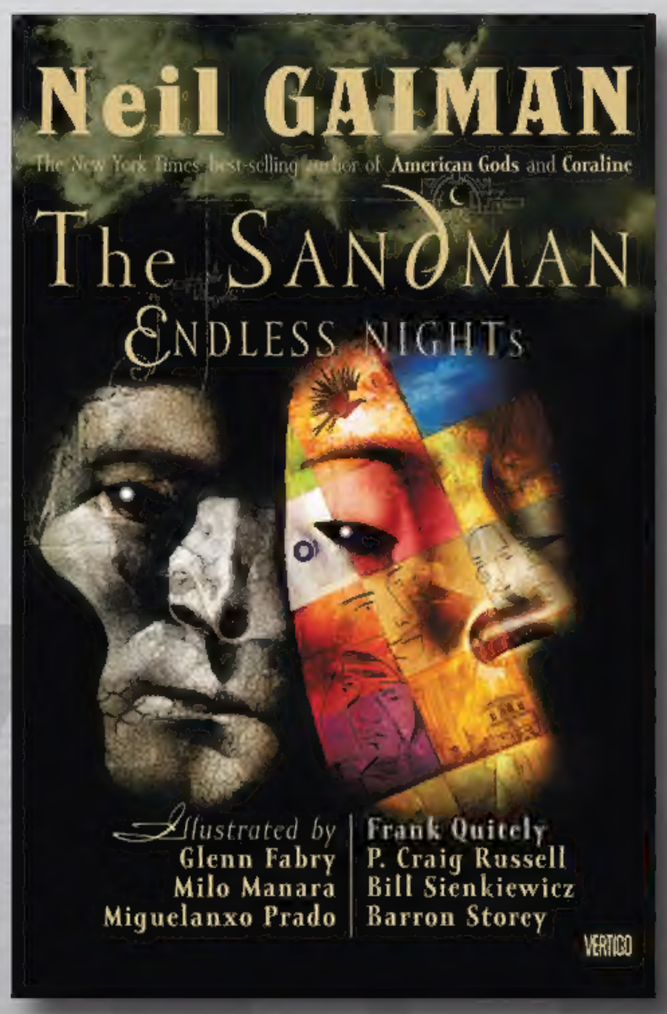

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